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V.—HISTORICAL SKETCH OF SYRIAC LITERATURE AND CULTURE.¹

I.

FORMATIVE AND ORIGINAL PERIOD, II-VII CENTURIES.

The Syriac language is of especial importance in the historical development of races, from the position which it took at the time of two great religious revolutions: the conversion of the East to Christianity and the rise of Mohammedanism. In the first case it became the sacred language of the converted Eastern peoples, and in the second it was the means by which Greek culture was communicated to the Arabs, thus powerfully contributing to that brilliant literary development to which Mediaeval Europe was so much indebted.

We find, then, that the use of the Syriac language was by no means confined within the narrow limits of its birth-place and home, that is, Syria and Mesopotamia; and that the most important fact in its history is that it became the organ of Christianity in the Eastern world, as Greek did in the Western. It was exclusively employed by the Christians of Persia, Armenia and Arabia, while Nestorian colonies propagated it in Hindustan and China, and it also spread to Yemen, Abyssinia and Nubia.

In the Persian kingdom, the Aramaean language, being spoken in several of the western provinces, was used officially in conjunction with Parsi; but, on account of the use of Syriac by the Christian missionaries and converts, a reaction of the national spirit in the beginning of the V century induced Bahram V (422-40) to persecute the Christians, and to forbid the use of Syriac together with Parsi at the court and in the schools. This, however, was but a momentary reaction; the Nestorians made every day greater

¹ It is unfortunate that orientalists have not considered that the time has yet arrived to undertake the history of any of the Semitic literatures. For Syriac, an immense amount of material is at hand in the Catalogue and Bib. Orient. of Asseman, and the Catalogue of Prof. Wright. The need of some sketch which should bring out the salient features in the literary history of Syria has occasioned the present article.

progress, and Syriac came to be recognized in Persia as a learned language.

Armenia was still more under the religious influence of Syria; all over the country, convents of Syrian monks were established, and, as the conversion of the Armenians was mainly through Syrians, Syriac long continued to be universally employed as the language of learning and religion. In the time of Mesrob and Moses of Khorene, there arose a reaction in favor of the Greek church and especially of the national language.

This universal use of Syriac was facilitated by the fact that, at an early period, translations were made into Syriac of nearly all the works of the Greek Fathers, who were thus made completely available. These versions, made from the II to the VI century, are generally preserved in MSS several centuries older than the earliest MSS of the Greek texts; so that, as Prof. Wright remarks in the preface to his Catalogue of the Syriac MSS of the British Museum, no critical edition of the Greek Fathers can henceforth be made without due reference to the Syriac versions.

Besides this, many important works, the Greek text of which is lost entirely or in part, have been recovered in their Syriac versions. To illustrate this fact it will be sufficient to mention, among others, Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Hippolytus, and the apologies of Melito and Ambrose, etc. All the works of Eusebius of Caesarea were translated into Syriac, perhaps even during the lifetime of the author, for he himself speaks of one of his friends as occupied in translating from Greek into Syriac; several are found in a MS of the year 411, the earliest dated MS known, as the History of the Martyrs of Palestine and the Theophania; the Greek text of these works is, in great part, lost. The same may be said of the Festal Letters of Athanasius, and, in part, of the work against the Manichaeans of Titus of Bostra, both of which are preserved, in Syriac, in the same MS of 411. We possess also Syriac versions of the writings of Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, and many others. It is most probable that all these versions were made by the interpreters from Greek into Syriac, who were regularly attached, from an early date, to the churches of all the cities of Syria. The apocryphal books which circulated in the III and IV centuries were very popular in Syria; and we find Syriac versions of a number the Greek texts of which are lost or incomplete.

The earliest production that we possess in Syriac literature, of

any importance, is the version of the Bible called Peshitta, or the Simple, which, most critics agree, was made during the first part of the II century, and which, from its antiquity and fidelity, is of the greatest value for textual criticism. The question of the priority of the so-called Curetonian Gospels is one which has raised much discussion, but the weight of evidence seems in favor of the Peshitta.

William Cureton has published, in his *Ancient Syriac Documents* and in his *Spicilegium Syriacum*, a number of writings belonging to this early period. The most ancient seems to be the letter of Mara, son of Serapion, to his son Serapion, which Ewald assigns to a period shortly posterior to the taking of Jerusalem. Of historical and legendary interest are the *Doctrine of Addai*¹ and other documents relating to the conversion, early traditions and history of the Church of Edessa.

The noted heretic Bardesanes or Bar-daisan of Edessa (b. 155), who flourished at the close of the II century, wrote all his works in Syriac, as we learn from Epiphanius, Eusebius and Theodoret. Moses of Khorene attributes to him a history of Armenia. His *Dialogue on Fate* is now lost; the dialogue entitled *Book on the Laws of Countries*, published by Cureton, and for some time attributed to Bardesanes, was probably written by his disciple Philip, and Land² has shown that the fragments preserved by Eusebius in his *Praep. Evang.* must belong to it.

Bardesanes and his son Harmonius composed many hymns, the metre of which was their invention; these became extremely popular and were in universal use in the churches of Edessa, where they were sung during religious service up to the time of S. Ephraem (c. 350), who, on account of their pernicious and anti-christian character, labored to replace them by others of his own in the same metre—which was thenceforth known as the metre of S. Ephraem.

Here we must also mention, although its date is uncertain, the lost *Annals of Armenia*, by Mar Abbas Katina, from which Moses of Khorene in the V century borrowed largely; also the *Annals* attributed by the same author to Lerubna, probably a disciple of Bardesanes.

At the same time the semi-gnostic Tatian the Assyrian, the disciple of Justin Martyr, wrote in Syriac his *Diatessaron* or

¹ Phillips, G. *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle*. London, 1876.

² *Anecdota Syriaca*, t. I, p. 51.

Harmony of the Four Gospels,¹ which was a work of great importance and widespread influence, as it was used in many parts of Syria in place of the texts of the Gospels themselves. Theodoret tells us² that he found in his Syrian diocese more than 200 copies of it which he suppressed as dangerous. We know that S. Ephraem wrote a commentary on the Diatessaron.³ It is a welcome piece of news that an Arabic translation of the Diatessaron has been unearthed in the Vatican Library, and is in course of publication by P. A. Ciasca.

Mani, the author of Manichaeism, although a Persian, wrote mostly in Syriac; many of his writings, perhaps suppositious, still existed in the East in the X-XI centuries, when Arabian writers, having access to them, were able to transmit to us the most trustworthy account of Mani and his doctrines.⁴

Syriac was thus as early as Mani (end III century) a sacred language in Persia. Later, in the IV century, we find all the Persian bishops writing in Syriac; for example, in the first half of the century Simon Barsabboë, bishop of Seleucia, Milles, bishop of Susa, and above all Jacob Aphraates, the Persian sage, whose discourses, written c. 340,⁵ are models of syriac diction. Later works of this Perso-Syrian school are exemplified in the Introduction to Logic of Paul the Persian, dedicated to Chosroes I, and in the numerous writings of the leading men of the schools of Nisibis and Seleucia.

On the other hand, we know that there were relations between

¹ There has been a confusion made between Tatian and Ambrose, who also wrote a Gospel-Harmony; we find it in Ebed-Yesu op. cit. "Tatian who is Ambrose," etc. The Gospel-Harmony translated into Latin by Victor of Capua, and attributed to Tatian, has been thought by most critics not to be his. The discovery of the Arabic version in the Vatican Library, where it has lain so long—for Asseman speaks of it in his Bib. Or.—will clear up many doubts concerning its form. The text is not yet published, but a preliminary notice has been given by P. A. Ciasca, *De Tatiani Diatessaron arabica versione, codicem arabicum vaticanum descripsit locorumque Evangelii in Tatiani opere contentorum seriem exhibuit*. Paris, Impr. Nat. 1883. (In T. IV, *Analecta S. Spicil. Solem.*)

² Haeret. fab. I 20.

³ Bar-Salibi (XII century) is the authority for this statement; cf. Assem. B. O. T. II 159-60.

⁴ E. g. Albiruni, *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, transl. by Sachau, 1879, and An-Nadim, *Kitab-al-Fihrist*, ed. Flügel, 1871-72.

⁵ W. Wright, *The Homilies of Aphraates, the Persian Sage*, 1868. Cf. Forget, *De Vita et Scriptis Aphraatis*, 1882.

Syria and India; Bardesanes obtained much information from Indian envoys; the book *Kalilah wa Dimnah* was translated into Syriac by Bud Perioduta (Περιοδευτής) in the VI century.¹

The IV century witnessed the blooming of Syrian literature into its golden age; and its great representative is without doubt S. Ephraem, the most prolific and gifted of Syrian writers, whose style became a model for elegance and purity, and who had, more than any other Syrian, a true poetic spirit. His exegetical writings include commentaries on all the books of the Old and New Testament; his numerous hymns are famous; he wrote controversially against all the heresies, excepting his own, then prevalent in Syria, those of Marcion, Bardesanes, Mani, the Montanists, and also against the Jews. Many of his writings are of interest as affording historical matter, like his hymns to the city of Nisibis at the time of the siege of 350 and the Persian war of 359-63.² He favored, among the earliest, the study of Greek writers, and especially mentions Plato, Aristotle, Porphyry, Galen and Hippocrates as worthy of particular notice.

Contemporary writers were the Chorepiscopus Mar Balai and Cyrillonas, some of whose fine hymns have been preserved.³ Gregory of Cyprus was noted for his ascetical writings and his correspondence with Epiphanius. Maruthas, bishop of Tagrit, wrote the Acts of the Martyrs who suffered under kings Sapor II (309-78), Bahram V (420-40) and Jezdegerd II (440-98). These documents were, in part, published by St. Ev. Asseman, but many, as those contained in the MSS of the British Museum, still remain inedited. They are of especial interest for the history of the Eastern Church.

The second light in Syriac literature, after S. Ephraem, is Isaac of Antioch,⁴ who flourished from the end of the IV to the middle of the V century. His voluminous writings, all in metrical form, have a bearing, not only on ecclesiastical history and controversy, but on the religion, laws and customs of his age, and on the various invasions of the Persians and Arabs. They have besides the merit

¹ Two different versions exist in Syriac; one was published by Prof. Bickell, in 1876, and another has just been edited by Prof. W. Wright, of Cambridge.

² S. Ephraemi Syri Carmina Nisibena, ed. G. Bickell, 1866.

³ Cf. Overbeck, S. Ephraemi Syri aliorumque opera selecta; Bickell, *Berichtigungen zu Cyrillonas*, 1881 (ZDMG, XXXV 2, 3).

⁴ S. Isaaci Antiocheni opera omnia, ed. G. Bickell. T. I and II. Gissae, 1873-77.

of beauty of diction; Jacob of Edessa (†710), the severest and most competent judge in the question, as he was the founder of the school of purists, says the most elegant and admirable of Syrian writers were Ephraem, Isaac, James of Sarug and Philoxenus of Mabug.

The important position which Rabulas, bishop of Edessa (412-435), took in the Nestorian controversy is a matter of history; he attempted, without success, to stem the Nestorian tide which rapidly became so powerful in Edessa, and, among other means for the furtherance of the orthodox cause, he made and spread a Syriac version of the writings of the famous Cyrill of Alexandria. We have also many original writings of his: canons, monastic rules, letters and homilies.¹ Of other orthodox writers of the V century it will be sufficient to name Dadas, Cucitas, noted poets, and Cosmas, the author of a biography of S. Simon Stylites. Of interest for the knowledge of Pre-Justinian law in the East is the collection entitled "Secular Laws of the Emperors Constantine, Theodosius and Leo";² probably, as Land conjectures,³ a compilation of the famous law school of Berytus.

The Nestorian heresy, as we have already remarked, spread rapidly in Syria before the middle of the V century, and a great part of the learned and literary men of the school of Edessa embraced it, and were the agents for the conversion of the Persians to its doctrines. The foremost among them were Baršauma, Narsi, and Abraham and John of Beth-Rabban; who, when exiled from Syria, were made bishops in Persia, and founded there the famous Nestorian schools, from which went forth the swarms of missionaries to found in Hindustan, Tartary, China, Africa and Arabia colonies which flourished for many centuries, and some even down to modern times.

Connected with Nestorianism is the change which studies underwent in Syria during the V century. The national Eastern spirit came more and more under the influence of Greek learning; a change which widened the scope of Syrian studies and brought them into connection with the classic world of thought, as they gradually became acquainted with the entire Greek encyclopaedia. From this time, Syrian literature ceased to be almost exclusively religious. We have already spoken of the numerous versions

¹ Overbeck, *Op. cit.*

² Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*. T. I, pp. 30-64 and pp. 128-55.

³ *Ibid.*, p. ix of introduction.

from the Greek Fathers, made in the preceding centuries; but at this time the Syrians began also to study classic Greek writers, especially the philosophers. It seems to have been the care of the teachers of the academies or schools to make these versions for use in their public teaching. This custom became still more general during the VI century, when Sergius of Ras'ain (c. 530) was especially active in translating Greek philosophical and medical writings. Unfortunately, it is generally impossible to be certain whether the greater part of these versions from the Greek are due to this early school or to the even more flourishing and active one of the VIII-IX centuries.

A version of Aristotle's works was made early in the V century by Ibas, Cumas and Probus,¹ teachers of the school of the Persians at Edessa. The Syrians became and always remained ardent followers of Aristotle, although the Neo-Platonic school also had many followers, and even it may be said that Aristotle's doctrines were viewed by them through the Neo-Platonic lens. Subsequent versions and commentaries of many of Aristotle's works were made by Sergius of Ras'ain and Severus Sabocht.² There still remain early versions of many philosophical treatises attributed to Pythagoras, Socrates, Theano, Lucian, Themistius, etc.,³ as well as of commentaries by Proclus and Porphyry. Among works belonging to other branches of literature we may cite Isocrates' orations, the sayings of Menander, the *Geoponicon*, two treatises of Plutarch, the works of Hippocrates and Galen.

We have several times had occasion to allude to the schools of Edessa and Nisibis, and in order to give a complete account of the influences which combined to give to Syrian literature its tone and character, it is necessary to answer the query: How was education carried on in Syria? What was the education-system which formed the men who took a prominent part in the literary world?

Education was provided by numerous and flourishing schools or universities, established not only in the large cities of Syria and Mesopotamia, but also in the principal monasteries. It would be superfluous to recall how intimately the establishment of schools was connected with the rise of Christianity, or to mention those of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Rome. To the school of

¹ Ebed Yešu's Catalogue of Syrian Writers ap. Assemani Bib. Or. T. III, p. 85.

² Cf. Hoffmann, *De Hermeneut.* ap. Syros Aristoteleis.

³ Sachau, *Inedita Syriaca*, 1870.

Edessa an early origin is also attributed ; it is said to have been founded towards the middle of the III century by Macarius, the master of S. Lucian Martyr ; this is asserted in the life of the latter contained in Metaphrastes.

It is an interesting fact that Pantaenus, who established the school of Alexandria, came from Syria, and probably from the region of Edessa ; and that Lucian, who established the critical school of Antioch and was the master of Arius, was the pupil of Macarius of Edessa. This is but one indication of the great extension of Syrian influence during the early period of Christianity.

S. Ephraem (330-73) first taught in the school of Nisibis at the request of his friend James, the bishop of the city. But on the taking of Nisibis by the Persians he went to Edessa, where he founded a school and soon collected around him a numerous following.

In Syriac MSS of the VI to the VIII centuries there is frequent mention of the schools of Edessa, Nisibis and Seleucia, Dorkenae (founded c. 385), Beth-Nuhadra, Mahuza, Tirhan, Beth'abe, Marga, Cufa, Bagdad, etc. As the Persians and Armenians were in religious dependency on Syria, it is not surprising to find in Edessa a school of the Armenians and a school of the Persians, in which, of course, as in all the other schools, the Syriac language was exclusively employed.

This school of the Persians obtained a world-wide reputation, and contained in its teaching body the ablest of Syrian "litterati." When the Nestorian heresy broke out, the leaders of the school were the strong supporters of Nestorius and Theodore of Mopsuestia and the bitterest opponents of Cyrill. Bishop Rabulas was obliged to expel them from Syria ; but, when in 435 Ibas, one of their own party, succeeded Rabulas, they were recalled from Persia. They circulated syriac versions of the writings of Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, to whose authority they appealed. Finally, however, in 489 the Emperor Zeno ordered the school to be destroyed and the teachers expelled. Theodorus Lector remarks correctly, that the school of the Persians was the means for converting the Persian nation to Nestorianism.¹

Of the exiles some established themselves at Nisibis, others at Seleucia or Modain, in both of which cities they founded schools, the first of which was directed by Narses, and the second by Acacius.

¹ Cf. the Letter of Simon of Betharsam ap. Assemani B. O. T. I, p. 351 foll.

That of Nisibis soon acquired all the celebrity of the mother-establishment at Edessa, and its fame passed even into Africa and Italy.¹ The succession of their rectors and professors through several centuries has been preserved, as well as many details regarding their constitution and development.²

The number of students attending the universities was considerable; thus it is recorded that under Hanan (middle VI century) the attendance at Nisibis amounted to fully 800. Here nothing was taught but theology, while Grandisapur was the great centre for the study of medicine; but, on the other hand, all the branches of study then known were represented at most of the schools; as grammar and rhetoric, dialectics and philosophy, arithmetic and geometry, medicine, astronomy, poetry and music. Practice was often combined with theory; the medical students were allowed to practise in the hospitals, and the church choirs afforded practice in music.

The universities were governed by strict laws issued by the rectors under approval of the religious authorities, which laws the students took their oath not to violate under penalty of excommunication. The privileges of the schools were great; they were generally exempted from immediate ecclesiastical control; the scribes, doctors and other teachers (especially in later times) had the right of voting at the Synods, and in the election of Patriarchs, etc., on the same footing as the bishops and priests.³

This necessarily brief and incomplete view of the sphere of action of the schools in Syria shows, at least, that they were a most important factor in forming the thought of the age and directing its literary development. We will now return to the subject of Syriac literature at the point where this digression was made.

The VI century was a period of extraordinary literary activity; during its opening years flourished the two writers who complete the quartette of model writers cited by Jacob of Edessa, that is, James of Sarug, bishop of Batnae (†521), and Philoxenus or Xenajas of Mabug or Hierapolis (485-519).

James of Sarug is, next to Ephraem, the most prolific of Syrian writers, although he does not approach him in originality or quality of thought. Besides commentaries, letters and hymns, his metri-

¹ Asseman B. O. T. III, P. II, p. 927-28, quoting Junilius Africanus (VI cent.) ad Primasium.

² *Ibid.*, p. 927-29.

³ For further information on the schools consult Asseman, Bib. Or. T. III, P. II, p. 919-948.

cal homilies, which gave him much fame, amounted to nearly eight hundred. They treat of every imaginable subject and person in the Old and New Testament, and many of them have an independent interest, as in them James of Sarug collected the popular traditions and legends which were current in the first centuries of Christianity.

A contemporary writer is Simon of Betharsam, whose letter on the Himyarite martyrs, published by Prof. Guidi, of Rome, gives valuable historical information regarding the condition, political and religious, of Yemen; of equal, if not greater, importance is his letter on the introduction of Nestorianism into Persia.¹ Joshua, the Stylite of Edessa, wrote a chronicle from the year 495 to 507, which has lately had the honor of two editions, one by the Abbé Martin, and the last and best by Prof. Wright, of Cambridge.

Of greater importance for history and church dogma is Philoxenus of Hierapolis, who was, with Severus of Antioch, the leader of the Monophysite sect. The influence of his writings was very great, for they mostly related to the burning questions of the time. They are also far superior to those of his contemporary, James of Sarug, in conciseness and pointedness of style, qualities to which Syrian writers were unfortunately not much addicted. Under his direction was made the version of the Bible which, from him, is called Philoxenian. Besides Bible-commentaries, sermons, and controversial writings against the Nestorians and Eutychians, he wrote numerous and important letters which show his extensive relations and influence. All his writings, as well as most of those of James of Sarug, remain, with but few exceptions, hidden in the MSS of Rome and London, awaiting some enterprising scholar who shall give them to the public.

We must now speak of the writing of history among the Syrians during the period under review. Edessa is known to have had archives at a very early date, which contained documents recording the noteworthy events of the time relating to Syria. Moses of Khorene consulted these archives, and is constantly referring to early Syrian writings, especially to the Annals of Armenia, by Mar Abbas Katina. Eusebius also speaks of having copied from them the letter of Abgarus. The letter of Abgarus, the doctrine of Addai, and a number of Apocryphal documents—several relating to the early history of the Church of Edessa—were doubtless derived from these archives. The first historical work which

¹ Published in *Assem. Bib. Or. T. I*, p. 346.

makes use of some of these documents is the anonymous chronicle of Edessa,¹ written towards the middle of the VI century, in which the events which took place from the foundation of the kingdom of Edessa, B. C. 129, down to the year 540 are carefully chronicled year by year. Much of its information is undoubtedly derived from records contemporary with the events. Thus the account of the great inundation of Edessa in 202 is taken verbatim from the procès-verbal drawn up at the time by the public notaries, Mar Jab bar Shemesh and Kaiuma bar Magartaṭ, whose signatures are attached to it together with those of the archivists Bardin and Bulid, under whom it was deposited in the public archives.

Besides the short chronicle of Joshua the Stylite, written in 507, may be mentioned the ecclesiastical history of Zacharias Rhetor, of Mytilene, in which, although he copies Socrates and Theodoret in the first part, from Theodosius II down to Justinian he brings forward much original matter.² To the end of the VI century belongs the history of John of Asia; of the first and second parts only fragments remain, the third and last is published by Cureton. He also wrote a collection of lives of holy Monophysites of this century, which is given in the II volume of Land's *Anecdota*.

These two histories of Zacharias and John were with Eusebius, Socrates, and the later Dionysius of Tellmahre, the great authorities consulted by Bar'ebraia in writing his chronicle. They will always be great authorities for the history of the East, and especially of the Eastern Church during the V and VI centuries. This is a study which has been too much neglected, and which would certainly yield many interesting discoveries to any scholar who made it a specialty.

We know by name of other historical writings, especially some mentioned by Ebed Yešu in his catalogue of Syrian writers—but they have all been lost. Hardly to be classed with history are the long historical romance of the Emperor Julian,³ the history of Alexander the Great, and a number of other fictitious narratives.

II.

ARTIFICIAL AND SCIENTIFIC PERIOD, VII-XIII CENTURIES.

We have followed the growth of Syriac literature through the VI century, and have seen how, by coming under the influence of

¹ It is published in Asseman, *B. O. T. I*, pp. 387-417.

² Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, T. III.

³ Hoffmann has published this text, *Julianos der Abtrünnige*. *Syrische Erzählungen*, 1881.

Grecian culture, it acquired increased breadth and value. We now come to the fatal date of the Mohammedan conquest; from that time forward Syrian civilisation lost its autonomy, the literature began to lose its freedom, and its development after a while came to a standstill. This commences the second and artificial period of its existence.

Although authorities differ much regarding the progress of the decay of Syriac as a spoken language in Syria and Mesopotamia, it cannot be doubted that Arabic, the language of the conquerors, began to have a strong influence immediately after the conquest. But as this influence was at first felt in administrative and commercial centres where the invaders settled, the cities alone were for some time infected, and it was strenuously opposed by the clergy. The Mohammedans, however, were far from wishing to impose their language by force; on the contrary, we find that in 853 the Khalif Al Motewakkel published an edict ordering Jews and Christians to teach their children Hebrew and Syriac, and forbidding them the use of Arabic;¹ this would seem to indicate that Arabic had made rapid progress and was in public favor. When Arabic did come into use among Christian Syrians, they generally preserved the Syriac alphabet, and the Arabic written in this way is called *Karshuni*.

As Arabic was then making insidious inroads, it was felt necessary to guarantee the purity of the Syriac language, both by establishing a standard of taste and by expressing as well as possible by written signs the delicate mechanism of pronunciation, which, before this, was too well known to need expression, and also by crystallizing into a grammatical form the laws of the language. Hence there arose a school of purists, of whom James of Edessa is the great representative. They performed, so to speak, the office of an "*Accademia della Crusca*," and delivered verdicts on the merits of different writers, and the admissibility of certain forms and words into the canon of the language; in this way the dialect of Edessa became celebrated for its great purity. Hence, also, came the invention of the complicated system of vowel-points, said to have been first employed by James of Edessa towards 700; and later on there came into use among the West-Syrians a system of vowel-signs adapted from the Greek vowels, which Theophilus of Edessa is thought to have used in his translation of Homer. The figure which stands at the head of this scientific period of the

¹ Quatremère, *Memoire sur les Nabathéens*, p. 142.

literary development, as Bar'ebraia stands at its close, is James of Edessa. His wide attainments and thorough education made his influence felt in almost every branch of study. His commentaries and scholia on the Bible became famous, and his authority in textual criticism great; he distinguished himself by his writings in the walks of philosophy, history, grammar and criticism.¹

Thus, while on the one hand the genius of the language was altered by Greek influence, on the other, the very mission which the Syrians undertook, from the VIII to the X century, of mediating between the culture of ancient Greece and the Arabs, led them to make of Arabic almost a second mother-tongue, to the detriment of the first.

The VII and VIII centuries were a period of as great activity as any in Syriac literature; one may even say that in extent of learning, in acquaintance with the range of Greek literature, and in the variety of subjects treated it surpassed the preceding centuries. But, as we have said, there was soon visible a decline in the *idiomatic* beauties of the language, and a great increase in the number of Greek words introduced into it.

The Syrians became divided, as early as the VI century, into two great camps, the Monophysite or Jacobite and the Nestorian. The culture of these two sects was essentially distinct in character, as each had its great centres of education and its system of teaching; the Nestorians were identified with East Syria, the Jacobites with West Syria. The Nestorians were more cosmopolitan and their influence extended over nearly the whole of Asia; but this influence was mainly religious, and their literature shows very clearly the bent of their studies. We have a very complete catalogue of it written by Ebed Yešu, of Nisibis, shortly after 1300. Concerning the Jacobites, unfortunately, we have not nearly as much information, still there is enough to show that it was the custom among them to acquire a very general culture. We have spoken in detail of the importance of considering the schools in order to get a proper understanding of Syrian culture; this is as true during this second period of the literature as it was during the first. One of the great centres for these schools was Bagdad, where many were founded in the VIII century, and Syrian learning made it its home for nearly three centuries. These

¹ Cf. an interesting article on his life and writings in Smith's Dictionary of Christ. Biography.

schools were resorted to, not only by Christians from Syria, but very largely by Mohammedans, who did not scruple to sit at the feet of their Christian masters and learn from them the wisdom of the Greeks.

Bagdad was thus made the centre of a great movement which was the most important external factor in the formation of the great Arabian culture. This is a fact too generally known and appreciated to permit us to linger on it, but a few details will not be out of place. In describing the influence which the Syrians, Nestorians, Jacobites and Harranians had over the Arabians, we must first examine in what departments it was active.¹ Of course, we must begin by setting aside everything pertaining to religion, morality and law, to say nothing of poetry, for in these the Arabian genius showed itself entirely original. We find that the principal branches taught by the Syrians were philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, geography and mechanics. In all these branches the Syrians supplied the Arabs with versions of the works of the Greeks on the subject; as in medicine, Hippocrates, Galen, Dioscorides, Rufus; in mathematics, Euclid, Ptolemy, Archimedes, Apollonius of Perga; in astronomy, Ptolemy, the masters of the school of Alexandria, Theodosius Tripolitanus, Autolycus, Aristarchus, etc., also Hipparchus, Hero and a dozen others.¹

Of the philosophical writings mention has been made already; they included Plato and Aristotle, most of the Peripatetics, Pythagoreans and Neo-Platonists. They also had the moral writings of Plutarch, and works attributed to Empedocles and Democritus.

It is doubtful whether Homer was ever rendered into Arabic, but Bar'ebraia tells us that Theophilus of Edessa translated into Syriac both works of Homer on the Trojan war; this, most critics allow, indicates the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

With the exception of astronomy and astrology, which the school of Harran, the continuator of Chaldaean traditions, took a large share in teaching the Arabs, all the other branches of studies were taught by the Christian Syrians, and principally by the Nestorians, who were in great favor at the court of Bagdad. The original works of this school on scientific subjects have mostly disappeared, owing to the subsequent indifference of Syrians to anything not religious. Hoffman, however, in his *Opuscula*

¹ On the subject of translations from the Greek, consult Wenrich, *De Auctorum Graecorum versionibus et commentariis Syriacis, Arabicis, etc.*, 1842.

Nestoriana (Kiel, 1880) has published Naniso'nis Hdhaijabheni et Hunaini Hertheni Liber canonum de aequilitteris; also Abhdiso'nis Gazarteni Carmen heptas. de aequilitteris.

It was under the Khalif Al Mansur, the real founder of the dynasty of the Abbasidae (754-774), that the patronage of Syrian learning began; in fact, before this the Arabs had not paid any attention to literary pursuits. We learn that the salaries given to these Syrians were very considerable. George bar Bochtješu, the physician of Al Mansur, had an income equal to about a million of francs yearly; this George was the founder of the famous Bochtješu family, which continued for many generations his fame for medical learning. We must here mention that the great medical school where all the best masters were trained, including the above-mentioned George, was at Gandisapur in the Persian Empire, where it was founded by the Nestorians in the V century. John bar Mesue was also noted for his versions of Greek medical works under Harun al Rashid and Al Mamun. It was the great care of these liberal patrons of learning to send everywhere in search of the works of Greek literature in order to have them translated.

But the most celebrated of all this crowd of learned Syrians was Honain ben Ishaq, who flourished under Al Motewakkel; he translated into Syriac and Arabic, among others, the writings of Hippocrates, Dioscorides, Galen, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Alexander Aphrodisiensis, Euclid, Archimedes and Ptolemy. Nor were these always simple versions, for often a commentary was added. Both his son Ishaq ben Honain and his nephew Hobaish followed his example. It would be useless to speak of other almost contemporary writers like Kosta ben Luka, Abu Bashar Mata, Jahja ben Adi, etc., who enjoyed the patronage of the Khalifs, and were at the head of schools.

It is a notion not yet sufficiently refuted that fanaticism was a distinctive trait of the Arab conquerors. The mere facts show the contrary; religious liberty and autonomy were allowed to Christians, as a rule, and an unusual impartiality, one might even say favor, was shown them, especially by the dynasty of the Abbasidae. To them were given posts of the greatest confidence, and they were even appointed governors over cities and provinces.

An anecdote is related by Amru of the Khalif Motaded Billah. One of his principal magnates, Abdalla ibn Soleiman, was accused to the Khalif of favoring the Christians. On his presenting his

answer to this accusation, the Khalif said that, far from thinking the worse of him for this, it was his own opinion that Christians ought to be more trusted than Jews, Mohammedans or Magi; for the Jews were always looking forward to a universal dominion, the Mohammedans would be always trying to oust him from his place, and the Magi bore continually in mind that they were the former lords of the country. Then we have curious accounts of the way in which the Khalifs, as, for example, Harun al Rashid and Al Mamun, would make long visits at different monasteries, and when pleased would confer on them privileges.

The care of the Imperial treasury was also conferred on Christians, and it is a notorious fact that the court physicians at Bagdad were invariably Syrian Christians, the Khalifs thus following the custom of the Persian kings, in whose empire the famous Syrian medical school of Gandisapur was situated.

The noted Syrian physicians, as a rule, were also writers on medicine and translators of Greek medical works into Syriac and thence into Arabic, as those of Hippocrates, Galen, Paul of Ægina, Aaron of Alexandria, etc. Bar'ebraia gives a long list of the most noted of these medical writers from the VI to the X centuries, beginning with Sergius of Ras'ain, who had the reputation among Syrians of being the first who translated Greek philosophical and medical works into Syriac.

It is probable that in the VIII century an important Syrian school for the study of medicine was transferred to Bagdad, where it seems to have held undisputed sway. Thus we find there masters like John bar Mesue and George bar Bochtjesu in the VIII century, and the famous Honain ben Ishaq and his nephew Hobaish in the IX century. The physician Romanus became, in 887, Patriarch of Antioch under the name of Theodosius; he wrote a treatise on medicine, an important commentary on pseudo-Hierotheos' mystical work,¹ and made a collection of symbolical sayings derived, in many cases, from Greek sources.² He was also a devoted student of philosophy.

Philosophy.

The study of philosophy, which, as we have noted, began in the V century in Syria and increased in the VI, came more and more

¹ Cf. Rosen and Forshall's *Catalogus Codd. MSS Orient.* in *Mus. Brit. P. I.*, p. 74. I am at present preparing an edition of Hierotheos.

² M. H. Zotenberg, *Les Sentences Symboliques de Théodose, Patriarche d'Antioche*, 1877.

into favor. The most noted philosophers of the Peripatetic school were Severus Sabocht, bishop of Kennesrin, and George, bishop of the Arabs, both of whom had a very wide influence and many pupils.

Severus Sabocht (c. 630) was also distinguished for his writings on astronomical and geographical questions;¹ in MSS of the British Museum we find treatises by him on the *Analytica Priora* and on the *Περὶ ἐρμηνείας*. Among his pupils was the Patriarch of the Jacobites, Athanasius II, who made a version of the *Isagoge* of Porphyry. George, bishop of the Arabs (686-724), wrote the most complete and important commentaries on Aristotle that we have in Syriac; of these we find in a MS of the British Museum those on the ten Categories, the *Περὶ ἐρμηνείας* and the *Analytica Priora*.² James of Edessa also wrote on the Peripatetic philosophy.

It is known how soon the Arabs became the blind followers of Aristotle, how many remarkable commentators and expositors he found among them, and how his works were brought to the knowledge of the European world by means of versions from the Arabic. Now all these Arabic versions of Aristotle's works were made by Syrian Christians, during the IX and X centuries, from Syriac translations already existing; sometimes even a Syriac translation was first made by the same men, and then from this the Arabic. There was a regular school of these translators, and they were not simply translators, but also commentators. They were in high favor with the Khalifs, and for two centuries directed the studies of the Mohammedan world; afterwards, however, the Arabs surpassed their masters and showed an originality of their own.

Grammar.

The study of grammar began among the Syrians quite early, but seems not to have made much progress for a considerable period. Thus, we know of a number of grammarians of the VI century, but unfortunately their names alone have been preserved to us, like those of Jesudenah, Ahudemeh and Joseph Huzaiā, and others mentioned by John bar Zu'bi in the XIII century. The founder of Syriac grammar was Jacob of Edessa (†710),³ and, as

¹ Sachau, *Inedita Syriaca*, 1870.

² Cf. Ryssel, Dr. V., *Ein Brief Georgs, Bischofs der Araber, an den Presbyter Jesus. Mit einer Einleitung über sein Leben und seine Schriften*. Theol. Stud. 1883.

³ The fragments of his grammar found in a MS of the Brit. Mus. have been edited by Prof. W. Wright, 3 *Schriftchen zur Syrischen Literatur*.

he was thoroughly imbued with the Greek spirit, he modelled it on the Greek plan and adopted Greek terminology; but even he did not give us a complete grammar.¹ Other grammarians followed, John Estunaia and John Barkamiš. In the XI century, Elias bar Shenaia treated little else beside the letters and vowel-points. Elias of Tirhan's grammar has lately been published by Baethgen (Leipzig, 1880). John bar Zu'bi, about 1200, is the author of the first complete Syriac grammar; he was soon followed by Bar'ebraia, whose complete grammar is unsurpassed by native grammarians.

This second development of grammar was due, without any doubt, to the strong influence of the Arabian grammatical method, which, as early as the second century of the Hegira, had attained to a great degree of perfection.

Lexicography.

Lexicography did not receive as much attention among the Syrians as it did among the Arabs. It arose with the same scientific school of Syrians of the VIII-IX centuries. Then we have the glossaries of Jesu'a Maruzaia and Honain ben Ishaq, from which that of Bar Ali² was mainly derived; the latter flourished in the second half of the IX century; in the next century Bar-Bahlul³ enjoys the fruits of the labors of his predecessors. In these works the Syrian words are explained by their equivalents in Arabic, and there is a considerable and incongruous mixture of Greek words. Their value is especially great for indications of local dialects and the state of the language.

Besides these, and conceived on a different and more orderly plan, is the XI century Thesaurus of Elias bar Shenaia,⁴ also a prominent grammarian. There were also other works of even greater importance than these for Syrian lexicography; but some have been lost, and others, still shut up in Eastern convents, remain inaccessible to European scholars.

¹ Consult the Rev. C. J. Ball's able biography of James of Edessa in Smith's Dictionary of Christ. Biography, t. III, pp. 332-5.

² The first half of this glossary, from Alaf to Mim, has been edited by G. Hoffmann, *Syrisch-Arabische Glossen*, 1874.

³ Gesenius, W. *De Bar Alio et Bar Bahlulo, lexicographis Syro-Arab.* 1834-39.

⁴ A defective edition of this, with Latin translation, was made in 1636 by Thomas à Novaria.

History.

We have previously shown that the first historical works we know of were written in the VI century, and we spoke of Joshua the Stylite, the anonymous Edessa Chronicle, Zacharias, and John of Asia. In this second period, general histories were written by Jacob of Edessa, about 700, and by Dionysius of Tellmahre almost a century later; of the latter a single and very defective MS exists, from which the first half of the work was published.¹ Michael the Great, Jacobite patriarch c. 1100, also wrote an interesting history which has been preserved in an Armenian version. From all these sources, as well as from Eusebius and Sozomen, did the famous Bar'ebraia, in the XIII century, draw the materials for his *Chronicon*.

It is a curious fact that all the above historical works were written by Monophysites, and this is a sign of the different spirit animating the two great rival sects of the Monophysites and Nestorians. While the followers of Nestorius seem to subordinate everything to the religious element, the Monophysites give greater scope and importance to secular studies; with the former history meant ecclesiastical history; with the latter, more impartiality was shown. Thus, to take only Bar'ebraia as an example, he was an intensely ecclesiastical man, and yet he devoted the whole of the first part of his chronicle to political history. Not so with the Nestorians; if one reads the catalogue of their writers given by Ebed Yešu, Metropolitan of Nisibis, one will notice a swarm of histories which are ecclesiastical, and almost none which are not. Amru in his history states that ecclesiastical history began to be written among the Nestorians at the time of the Patriarch Jesujab of Adjabene, who died A. D. 660. In fact, at this time many ecclesiastical histories were composed by Elias of Maru, Daniel ben Mariam, Rostam, Aphnimaran, Barhadbeshiabba and Mar Atken, surnamed "Who pulls out his beard," probably because his asceticism took that form.²

We may well doubt the perfect correctness of this statement of Amru, that no ecclesiastical histories were written among the Nestorians before c. 660, for mention is made of that of Messiah Zacha c. 595, and of others.³ These works are not known in Europe, but we possess one of great importance in the monastic history of Thomas of Marga (beginning of IX century);⁴ he often

¹ Dionysii Telmahharensis Chronici liber primus, 1850.

² Asseman B. O. T. III, P. I, p. 148. ³*Ibid.*, p. 216. ⁴*Ibid.*, p. 463-501.

cites a number of the works mentioned above and partly replaces their loss. Asseman made use of it very freely; it will certainly throw much light on the condition and history of Syria during the period following the conquest, about which we are still so much in the dark, and its publication is looked forward to.

It has not been the object of this paper to give a complete enumeration of even the most prominent Syrian writers; thus nothing has been said of Salomon of Bassora, whose "*Liber Apis*" was published by Schönfelder, or of Chamis bar Kardache and George Varda, both Nestorian writers of authority.¹ Nor has any mention been made of the prominent Jacobites, John of Dara, Moses bar Cepha, and especially Dionysius bar Salibi. But a few words must be said on the most noted of Syrian historians.

Gregory Bar'ebraia, primate of the East (†1286), may be taken as the representative figure of the best phase of the late artificial Syrian development, always under Greek leadership. He did all that a man could do to revive learning and promote the study of the Syriac language; he was equally learned in Syriac, Greek and Arabic. His works may be considered as the *Summa* of the complexity of Syrian learning, as Thomas Aquinas' were the *Summa* of Scholasticism. His comprehensive mind, his indefatigable industry and his thorough acquaintance with the whole field of literature gave him a really encyclopedic knowledge, and enabled him to treat in his works, and to treat well, almost every imaginable subject.² He was famous even among the Arabs for his knowledge of history and medicine; a deputation of Arabian savants once waited on him, entreating him to translate into Arabic his famous Chronicle. His longer and shorter Syriac grammars are the most valuable we have. His works on civil and canon law are of the greatest interest. In philosophy he was a thorough Aristotelian, and there is no part of the philosophy of the Stagyrite which he did not illustrate. He was indefatigable in collecting

¹ Several of their hymns are translated in Bagster, *Liturgy of the Nestorians*.

² His writings have received much attention of late, and a number have been printed, as *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, edid. Abbeloos and Lamy, 1872-77. *Œuvres Grammaticales*, éditées par l'abbé Martin, 1872. *Ecclesiae Antiochensae Syrorum Nomokanon* (ap. Mai, *Script. vet. nova coll.* T. X, P. II, pp. 1-268). *Carmina*, Recens. Scebabî, Romae, 1877. *Carmen de Divina Sapientia*, Romae, 1880. Also his commentaries on S. John (1880), Acts (1880), his *Scholia* on the 12 Minor Prophets (1882), etc.

For the bibliography of Bar'ebraia, Pick's article on Syriac Literature in McClintock and Strong's *Cyclopaedia* may be consulted.

for study the writings of past centuries, and would send his agents throughout Syria in search of them; for example, on the last folio of the MS of the Book of Hierotheos, in the British Museum, we read a note saying that Bar'ebraia desired to have a copy of this work, and sent his emissaries over the entire East to find it, and this present copy was finally secured;¹ hence we learn that it was from this very MS that Bar'ebraia made his compendium of the Book of Hierotheos, of which we have several copies in Paris, London and Oxford.

Although during the century which succeeded Bar'ebraia we still find a few lonely representatives of the dying Syrian culture, they are the last sparks of an expiring fire. Bar'ebraia was the last of the Syrians.

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¹ Rosen and Forshall's Catalogue, p. 74, and Wright's Catalogue, T. III, add. to Rosen and Forshall.